BX9843
.P76 W5

Hollinge
pH

"Whosoever Shall do the Will of God,
the Same is my Brother, and
Sister, and Mother."

ULYSSES G. B. PIERCE

WASHINGTON D C
ALL SOULS' CHURCH
1906

BX9843
.P76W5

"For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." Mark 3.35.

I would like for a little while seriously to consider with you the spiritual genius of the religion of Jesus. I wish we might take it up with the same impartiality and the same devotion with which a scholar might turn to Plato and say, "I would like to find out the thing which has made the philosophy of Plato the great influence that it has been in all history of opinion." I wish we might turn to it with something of the freshness and devotion with which one might go to an old art gallery and say, "Here are masterpieces recognized the world over. I will sit before this to see if I can discover the genius of it."

Now observe that that is a very different thing from discussing whether Plato's works ought to be bound in six volumes or in eight, or whether it is better for them to be in buckram or morocco. It is an entirely different thing from considering how large the picture is, and what has been its history. Those are all important questions. The bookbinder is naturally and justifiably more interested in the outside of Plato than in the inside. The historian is interested to know that Correggio's picture was once put up in a stable to keep the wind off the horses; it is a very vital matter to him. No wonder that Correggio is valued! But the artist seeks for the genius behind these things, and says, "Is it possible for me to lay hold on the few things without which this influence never

would have been?" We can not hope, of course, to do more than make a cursory examination, and yet the field is so rich that even to walk through it, and on a Sabbath day to pull some ears as we go, is not without its reward.

I think, if we study the religion of Jesus— the *religion* of Jesus, not the *theology* of Jesus—if we give ourselves to meditation on the religion of Jesus, we shall find that we are face to face with a great reality. We shall feel as if it were a part of the world itself, so thoroughly natural is it. It seems to match with climate, with geology, with custom. It seems as if it were the very embodiment of naturalness. And as we try to examine it more closely, I think we shall discover that there are a few elements in the religion of Jesus which have made it not only the power that it is, but are working to-day to make it the power that it was intended to be; and we shall find that that power, that spiritual genius, lies not in the number of volumes it is bound in, lies not in the external measurements of the picture, but in the inner spiritual quality. And I think we are quite right, perhaps, in specifying for the first one what we may call *abandon*—simplicity—the absolute *abandon* of this man to the spirit of religion. I know the Chinese sage had said, "The great man is he who does not lose his child heart;" but the founder of Christianity went further than that and said, "The good man is he who does not lose his child heart." The Chinese sage had used the child as an illustration by the way; the "master of the science of right living" put the child in the midst—not on the outer rim, but in the midst—and bade the disciples move back and get ample perspective.

"The kingdom of heaven," said he, "is like a child,"

Now what do we mean by that? We mean *abandon*. The child is ingenuous; he does not weigh motives whether it were better to do this on the whole, or whether, perhaps, it were not just as well to do that. He does not calculate; he knows too much to calculate. The child's genius is its absolute simplicity.

Observe, again, the genius of the child is the genius for growth. The beauty of the child is that you never kiss the same baby twice. Every day brings some new development, some new word in its life vocabulary, some new smile, some new sorrow. The child is a child because he is growing into manhood or womanhood.

So Jesus takes this as the illustration of his idea of religion. "Except ye become converted—except ye move into the realm where argument, discussion, and disputation are outgrown—except ye become as this little child—why, you can not even enter the kingdom of heaven," he says, "to say little about being greatest in the kingdom of heaven; you can not even enter the kingdom of heaven." That is what he says to people who have been following him for years, people who thought they were authority on religious matters. He says, "You are all wrong. The true symbol of religion is a happy, natural, growing child."

Jesus turned that in every possible way. It was like a diamond, that you could fashion this way or that way. It was literally the very core of his teaching. The child is a child because it has a father; it realizes the relationship of sonship, and the growth of the child is always in the perception of the filial spirit. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews detected that when he said, "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the

prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in a Son." That is, the filial relationship is the perfect organ of communication in religious matters; and the whole burden in the first place, of the teaching of the Master is to make men become like children in this perception of their reliance upon their Heavenly Father; of their worthiness to be cared for by him; of their willingness to ask the boldest question, and their willingness to take the answer he gives. "To as many as received him gave he power to become sons of God." "The kingdom of heaven is like a little child."

In the second place, we shall probably not err far if we assign as the second element of the spiritual genius of the religion of Jesus its *modesty*. Not often spoken of; but Jesus tried to urge it upon his disciples. Christianity has not yet learned the lesson. "I am a door." "In my Father's house are many mansions." "I am a door." Could anything be more modest than that? He does not claim to be even one of those many mansions; but simply says, "I am a door. Now, if you can use me to get into a larger perception of life; if you can use me to go through—my spirit to get into any one of those mansions in my Father's house—that is what I am here for." Hear him again. "I am a way." "A way." That does not mean a method of speculation; it means a road. The Romans knew how to build roads. The Master says, "I am a road." "I am not the goal; I am not the place from which the road starts; I am the road; I am the highway. Can you travel on this road? If so, join hands with me, like comrades, and we will march on." Notice the absolute modesty of that. Do

you wonder that a religion that had such a genius in it has undertaken to pervade the world? You would be a strange man if you did not believe that your mother was the best woman in the world; but you know also that your neighbor has the same estimate of his mother. And both men are right! I believe that Christianity is the best religion in the world, but I know that the Hottentot thinks that his is the best, and the Brahmin thinks that his is the best; and we come back to the spirit of modesty in religion—not casting pearls before swine, not blowing your trumpet in the marketplace and at the street corners, to be seen of men, but making yourself a door—making yourself a highway, and if your way of life is better than your neighbor's, he will need little persuasion to join you.

So Jesus was fond of using parables that illustrate modesty in religion. "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which was hidden." How modest! "The kingdom of heaven is like a pearl of great price, which was lost." It was not put in an art gallery to be admired; it was lost. But when people found out its true worth, then men one by one began to sell all they had to buy this one pearl. Sir Thomas Browne used to say that men are like ships—the more they have in them the lower they carry their prow. There is something like that in religion. The more genius it has, the more tenderly it touches the life nerve of religion, the more certainly it can do away with its superlatives, its exaggerated claims, and throw itself back with absolute *abandon* on the nature of things, and say, "No; Christianity is a door. Can you go through it and get a view of some of the many mansions beyond? It is a highway; we do not argue that it is the only one. The value of the road lies not in the road, but in the thing

that is at the other end. That is the test. Not how wide is the road, how old it is, but where does it go to?" "I am a good shepherd," says the Master. You know what Socrates called himself. The Master takes a different figure: "I am a good shepherd. If any man will come with me, he shall find abundance, and he shall go in and go out, and feed." Observe that—"he shall go in and go out." That is, he shall be a free man; he is not tied up; he can feed on this side of the fence or that side, wherever he wishes to; the only question being, when he comes back at night, Are you better nourished than when you left in the morning? The problem is not, Did you nibble grass on this side of the fence or on the other? but, Wheresoever you found it, were you able to make it into wool? Modesty in religion. And if one stops to think of it for a moment, the so-called agnostic movement has been a redeeming grace to our century. It has called men back from spiritual pride, has driven them to their knees to make them realize the precepts of this gentle Nazarene. "I am a way—a door—a shepherd"—the commonest kind of a workman; a shepherd of men's souls.

Or observe, in the third place, how the spiritual genius of the religion of Jesus touches the practical in men. Here it is entirely different from so many Oriental phases of thought. It is almost Anglo-Saxon in its brevity and its insistence upon practical life. Hear him: "Not every one that said, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." Well, who then? The people who believe right things? The people who go to church? The people who are careful with whom they associate? There would have been no genius in an answer like that. "Not every one that saith, Lord, Lord, but he that *doeth the will*

of the Heavenly Father." "The will of my Heavenly Father." Who is to interpret that will to you? Am I? No. "Do you not judge of yourselves what is right?" In other words, a man is to be helped not by the mumbling of phrases, the conjuring of beliefs, but by the absolute devotion of his life to do the thing that seems to him to be right. A while ago a symposium was organized among leading men to ask what was the greatest saying of the Master. Not an easy thing to select from pearls that which is largest and smoothest, but the concensus was this: That the greatest utterance, the distinctive utterance of this man of Galilee was this: "If thou art bringing thy gift to the altar, and there remember that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift, go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." Under those circumstances how many gifts would be brought to the altar on this Sunday morning or any Sunday morning? My hands are empty. No. Here is the genius of this man of religion, who speaks as he sees first-hand. The genius of religion is not to bring gifts, but to realize that the gift of God is to perform your duty to your neighbor. "And the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch." Well, how about them *before* Antioch? Were they not Christians just the same? Probably; but they were not called so; they were simply known as "men who loved their kind." It is little less than a stroke of spiritual genius, the way that the Master makes this the criterion of religious life—the absolute test of religious life, as you would test a thing in the laboratory or weigh it on the scales. Is there no standard, we say, in religious matters? Yes; he gives it.

People came to one of the Rabbis in Jerusalem and said, "Can you give us a law of religion which is so short that we can repeat it while standing on one foot?" And he said, "Yes; love your neighbor as yourself." And they came to Confucius and said, "Can you epitomize religion in one word?" "Yes; reciprocity." Jesus goes further and different from that. He specifies a thing that makes absolutely the test between true religion and false. "Hereby"—here is the test—"hereby shall men know that ye are my disciples." Because you belong to the church? No. Because you keep the company of the good? No. Because you believe everything that has ever been told you? No. "Hereby shall all men know that ye are my disciples, *that ye love one another.*" Now, that is the simplest thing in the world. It is what we were made for. We do not have to be great philosophers to love one another; we do not have to know who wrote the Psalms or the fourth Gospel before we can love our neighbor. That, says he, is the test. Or he expands the test in another way—a sort of Twentieth Century direction, if you please: "Hereby shall all men know that ye are my disciples, that ye bear much fruit." That is Twentieth Century; it is almost Anglo-Saxon. "Hereby shall men know that you are living the religious life, because you bring things to pass. It is not all talk; it is not all planning; but when your hand is put to a thing, things result. For no man putting his hand to the plow and turning back is fit for the kingdom of heaven."

Does not that justify the claim that I made that the genius of the religion of Jesus is almost Anglo-Saxon in its insistance upon ethical, practical life? "Hereby shall all men know that ye are my disciples." Was there ever

a church council where that test was applied? As delegates gather, the question is, Where are your credentials? "Here they are, signed by our minister or our Bishop; that ought to be enough." *It would not have passed current in Galilee.* The only question that would have been asked, either of her who was brought into the synagogue by hypocrites, or of the man on the lake, would have been, Do you love your kind? Do you love your own species? If so, that is all; other things will come. "Hereby shall all men know that ye are my disciples, in that ye love one another!"

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 021 928 530 9